# *The* Golden Rule

REV. RUSSELL CECIL, D.D.

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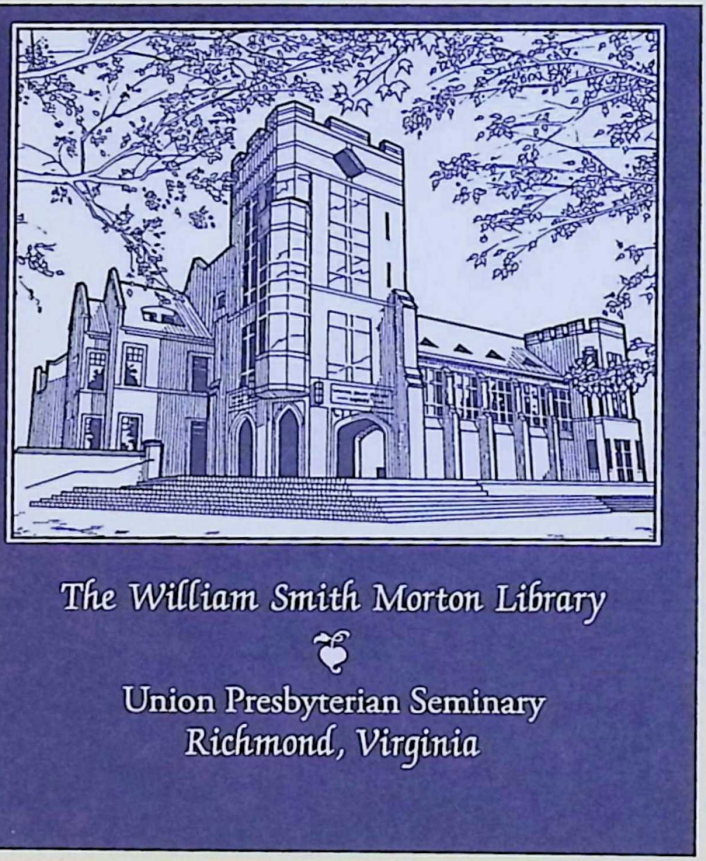

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# *The* Golden Rule

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*A Sermon prepared by the late Rev. Russell Cecil, D. D., Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church, Richmond, Va., and Chairman of the Publication Committee.*

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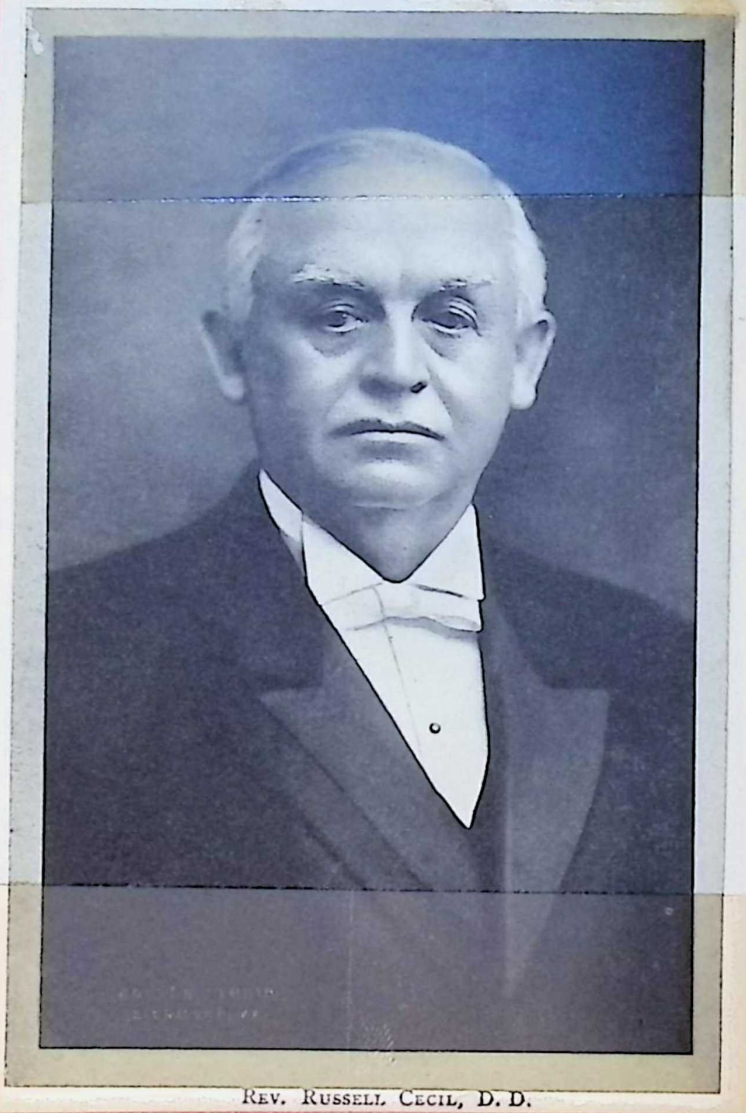

Rev. Russell Cecil, D. D.

# Russell Cecil

*An Appreciation*

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BORN OCTOBER 1, 1853
DIED JUNE 15, 1925

The life of Rev. Russell Cecil, D. D., born October 1, 1853, died June 15, 1925, was a benediction to a countless multitude who came under his influence, and he left as a legacy to those who were closely associated with him in Christian work, an example of high devotion to duty which will always be to them a source of inspiration and power.

Dr. Cecil's clear judgment, splendid poise and unfailing courtesy easily marked him for positions of leadership, and while carrying the heavy burden of a large and exacting pastorate, he always found time to perform such additional tasks as were assigned him by the courts of his Church, and was never too busy to take his full share in the promotion of civic enterprises which promised to advance the welfare of the community. While modesty and reserve controlled his actions, his great ability was quickly recognized in any group, and his wise counsel and construc-

tive suggestions were always helpful in solving difficult problems of Church or state.

Dr. Cecil became a member of the Publication Committee in 1901, and for about twenty-five years was an enthusiastic supporter of every plan for increasing the service of the Committee to the Church. In 1919 he succeeded the late Dr. James Power Smith as Chairman of the Committee. The officials and all members of the Executive Committee will ever hold as a precious memory their association with Dr. Cecil through these years of service, and we desire to record our deep sense of loss in the homegoing of this princely servant of God. The Church has lost a loyal and efficient worker, his family a devoted husband and father, and the community an illustrious and useful citizen, but all are the richer for his life and example.

Adopted by the Committee of Publication, October 6, 1925, and ordered spread upon the Minutes.

# Foreword

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At a meeting of the Executive Committee of Publication, of which he was Chairman, held June 9, 1925, Dr. Cecil discussed with friends the preparation of a sermon on "The Golden Rule" he was preparing for delivery on Sunday, June 14.

His keen mind and genial personality were impressed afresh upon his associates, and he took a most active part in planning a year of enlarged service to the Church on the part of the Publication Committee.

He completed the manuscript of the sermon and his last work was to revise and perfect the copy Saturday evening. While thus engaged he was stricken with apoplexy and his rich and fruitful life came to an end on Monday, June 15, 1925.

The sermon is published by the Publication Committee for its intrinsic value and as a Memorial to a man who gave the best of his great powers to our Church.

R. E. MAGILL, *Secretary,*
*Executive Committee of Publication.*

# *The* Golden Rule

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."—Matthew 7:12.

This verse is known as the Golden Rule of Christian Conduct, and many people, not a few of whom do not profess to be Christians, claim to have adopted this as descriptive of their way of life and of their attitude toward other people. I have endeavored to discover the author of this beautiful phrase, "The Golden Rule," as applied to these words of our blessed Lord; but all of my search has been in vain. No one, however, can question the beauty of the term. It is contended by some that Jesus is not the Author of the Golden Rule. It is found in the Apocryphal book of Tobit and in the teachings of Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, in the negative form. It remained, however, for Jesus Himself to make the positive declaration, as we find it here in the text, and also in virtually the same words in the gospel of Luke. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye

would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

In this positive form you have, not only the expression of justice in our dealings with our fellow men, but beyond that the expression of grace and goodness. The Golden Rule as our Lord puts it calls for love in the heart as well as an outward manifestation in the life. The Golden Rule is not only "the law," but it is also "the prophets." That is to say, it includes the whole teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures, as well as of the New. Jesus had a way of summing up the significance of God's revelation of His will as it is found in the Old Testament Scriptures in a few words, like these of the Golden Rule, and then giving to the words a new and fuller application. The Golden Rule as it comes from Jesus embraces everything of a practical nature in the Christian life.

It is a common experience with me, and no doubt with you also, to hear some one say, "Well, I do not claim to be much of a Christian, or perhaps not a Christian at all in the true sense, my faith is weak and faltering; but I have adopted the Golden Rule as the law of my life, to do unto others as I would

like them to do unto me; the Golden Rule is my religion." Now this is certainly a large claim, and I apprehend that many people make it without fully realizing the full significance of what they are saying and undertaking to do. I have never before taken the Golden Rule as a text for a sermon, and I do not remember ever to have heard a sermon preached upon it. But it occurs to me that half an hour spent upon thinking and talking about it might prove of practical value to our spiritual life; and therefore I ask your attention this morning to some thoughts upon the Golden Rule.

### *The Golden Rule in Business*

Let us consider the application of it in the business affairs of life. I understand there is a man of large business interests in the city of Cincinnati who is known as "Golden Rule Nash"; and for some years past he has been endeavoring to apply the principle of the Golden Rule in all of his business affairs and in all of his dealings with his employees. It is commonly reported by those who are acquainted with his experience that not only has his business largely increased, but his

would I treat those who perhaps are not as prosperous as I am, or who are dependent upon me for their daily bread?"

In short, when we come to apply the Golden Rule to the daily affairs of business life you will find that it is not an easy thing to do; and when a man says to me, "Well, I do not profess to be a Christian, but I live by the Golden Rule," I wonder if he really understands what he is saying, and if he realizes what a big proposition he has taken upon his hands. There are some people who say it is impossible to apply the Golden Rule in all business affairs of life. Jesus, however, did not think so; and He is our greatest Teacher as well as our greatest Example.

### *The Golden Rule in Society*

But let us next consider the application of the Golden Rule to the ordinary social affairs of life. It should not only apply to business, but also to society.

If you are to follow the Golden Rule you cannot be harsh in your judgment of others. In this Sermon on the Mount our Lord touches practically upon all of these applications of the Golden Rule which I am en-

deavoring to bring to your attention. He says, "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure you meet, it shall be measured to you again." If we are harsh in our judgment of others we may be sure that others will be harsh in their judgment of us. If you do not wish others to judge you harshly, when you are perhaps in trouble or difficulty, or have committed serious errors or mistakes, you must not be harsh in your judgment of them. The best of society is by no means perfect; and the best people in society are by no means perfect. This is true in any rank or grade of life—among the rich and the poor, the high and the low—and the same principle should apply, and the Golden Rule is equally true for us all. If you do not wish others to be bitter against you, jealous of you, and critical of you, be sure that you do not indulge in such a state of mind toward them.

The one thing above all others which should control us in our application of the Golden Rule is the exercise of charity toward the faults of other people. We should remember that we have faults of our own, and we wish to be judged charitably. Charity

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covers a multitude of sins, and it is a cloak of love which we should use in all of our thoughts and dealings with others. If you are so unfortunate as to hear a slanderous story against one of your fellows, do not be eager to believe it. But be slow to believe it, and do not believe it at all, unless you have proof positive that it is true, and proof that cannot be ignored. Many persons are seriously injured by slander, and because people are not willing to exercise charity toward them.

We may be kind and helpful in society, as in business and in other matters of life. Sometimes people are cruel in their extreme reserve; and leave the impression (whether they mean to do so or not) that they are very much better and superior to their neighbors. This is what our Lord used to characterize as Pharisaism; and He was not mild in the terms He used concerning it. I remember many years ago reading a lecture by Ruskin addressed to girls; and one of his exhortations to them, very earnestly emphasized, was, "Girls, do not be cruel to each other." At that time I could hardly appreciate what he meant. But I have learned that girls in a very quiet, and often apparently sweet way, can be exceedingly cruel to each

other. If you do not wish others to be cruel to you, do not you be cruel to them. The Golden Rule can find a multitude of applications in ordinary social life.

### *The Golden Rule in the Family*

Next we may consider the application of the Golden Rule in the family life. The home is a wonderful place to try it. Many homes would be happier and better if the Golden Rule was constantly in use among the members in their dealings with each other.

Love should be the controlling force in the home. But we are often tempted to be critical and fault-finding, even with members of our own household. If one gives way to that disposition he should not be surprised if others do the same thing. We should learn to be gentle and patient with each other. Large families and large family connections may be very happy, useful and helpful to each other, if they will apply the Golden Rule in all of their dealings with each other. On the contrary, if they are not willing to apply the Golden Rule, there may be much unhappiness and misery and hard feelings among them. It is easy enough in any community to compare the home life of families.

Some very large families, which have multiplied to maybe a dozen different households, live in great peace and harmony; while others are not able to get on with each other, but are jealous, and continually snarling and fighting each other. If we are to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, we should certainly begin in our own homes and among our own connections and blood relations. Some large family connections are a great blessing to the community in which they live; while others manage to keep the community in a continual snarl.

Let us therefore study not to be critical of each other; but to be helpful to each other. Not to be jealous of each other, but to rejoice in each other's prosperity. Nothing will produce more unhappiness than bitterness and jealousy in the home life. We should not be forgetful of each other's interests; but should study to advance each other's interests.

### *The Golden Rule in the Church*

But once more, let us consider the Golden Rule in its application to our work in the Church as Christians. After all it is the Christian Rule of Conduct, and comes to us

from our blessed Saviour Himself. He gives it a broad and comprehensive application when He says, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." I have step by step made certain practical applications of the Golden Rule—to business, to society, and to the home—but as Christians we cannot really separate our lives into great departments, and say that we can apply the Golden Rule to one, and not to another. What I have had in mind especially up to this point is that many people, who do not profess to be Christians, yet claim that they live by the Golden Rule. My contention is, if you are going to live by the Golden Rule, you have to live the Christian life; and certainly it must begin in the Church of God, in our dealings with our fellow Christians. If you are not a Christian, can you really live by the Golden Rule? and if you are a Christian, are you living by the Golden Rule? Let each one of us take this now to himself and be honest with himself.

If as Christians we are to live by the Golden Rule we must practice the forgiving spirit. Suppose you have offended some one,

or done something you ought not to do; you certainly wish to be forgiven. If you wish others to forgive you then you must be forgiving yourself. Our Lord goes so far in this same Sermon on the Mount as to make the application, "I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." This means that the Father in heaven is continually forgiving those who have offended against Him. Indeed all of us who are saved must be forgiven by the heavenly Father, and He is continually doing good to us, even when we are forgetful of Him and sinning against Him. Now, says Jesus, if you are to be the children of your Father which is in heaven, you should cultivate the spirit of your Father in heaven. He even goes so far as to say, "If ye frogive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

This Golden Rule should control us in our work in the Church. We need to be helpful to each other, not critical of each other. What can we hope to accomplish by simply bearing down on each other, and abusing other people in the Church, often times when we ourselves are no better than they? I must say I have never seen much good accomplished by a professional kicker in the Church, or anywhere else. I believe that those who do most good in the Church are those who exercise the loving, forgiving spirit, the helpful spirit, the spirit of co-operation; those who are ready to do their part, and not to shift the responsibility on other shoulders, and then criticise these others for not doing what they think ought to be done. Let us not be too sensitive and too afraid of having our feelings hurt. Let us think about the work of the Church, let us love that, and love our brothers and sisters who are endeavoring to do their part. Treat others, even in the Church of God, as you would have them treat you. Be warm and friendly and loving and prayerful. It has been one of the chief characteristics of the life of this Church that the people have lived in such harmony and good-will toward each

other. Let us continue to cultivate that trait; as Paul says, "Study the things that make for peace." The Apostle James gives us some good advice when he says, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

Let us apply the Golden Rule also to those who are tempted, and to those who give way before temptation. All of us are subject to temptation, and all of us yield to it. So the apostle Paul says in writing to the Galatians, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." This means, if one be overtaken in a fault, do not begin to criticise him, to abuse him, to withdraw from him and to threaten to put him out of the Church. But we are to restore him, remembering that we are all subject to temptation. Treat him as you would like for him to treat you. Suppose you commit a fault, suppose you yield to temptation, would you wish all the people in the Church to criticise you, and leave you to go from bad to worse? Treat

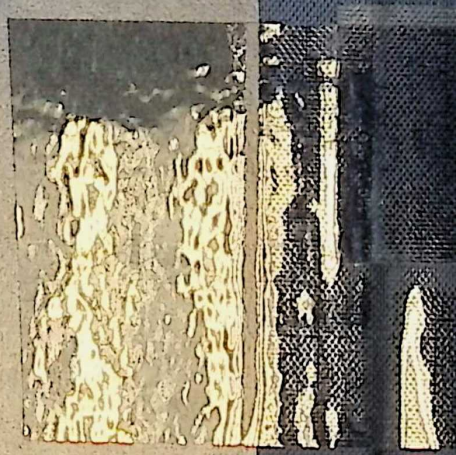
others as you would have them treat you under similar circumstances.

Let us also apply the Golden Rule to those who are in trouble. Be sympathetic and helpful to the sick and the sorrowful. When you are in trouble, how do you feel, if others forget you, neglect you, are cold and unsympathetic in their attitude toward you? You appreciate the kindness, the love and the help of your friends in times of trouble; therefore you should exercise the same spirit toward them. There is nothing that touches the heart like sympathy and help, when one is in trouble; and frequently, I am happy to say, people who are in great trouble tell me, "I did not know I had so many friends; and their kindness has broken my heart." This is the Christian spirit; this is really the application of the Golden Rule.

### *Help Needed*

In these, and in many other ways which I have not mentioned, when we think seriously about it, we can understand what our Lord meant by saying, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and

the prophets"; and we can understand what it implies when one says he does not claim to be a Christian, but that he adopts the Golden Rule as his rule of life. How large a contract he has taken upon himself! Now honestly I do not believe that any man who is not a Christian can apply the Golden Rule; and I do not believe any Christian can do it, as our Lord intends for him to do it, unless he is led by the spirit of God and has His sustaining grace. If you and I are going to live by the Golden Rule, we must live near to the Saviour. Our Master says it is only in this way that we are to be the children of our Father who is in heaven. We have to learn to be like Him.

If you are going to adopt the Golden Rule, and certainly you cannot adopt a better one, you will have to start out by giving your heart to Christ; and you must ask His guidance and the help of His grace.

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